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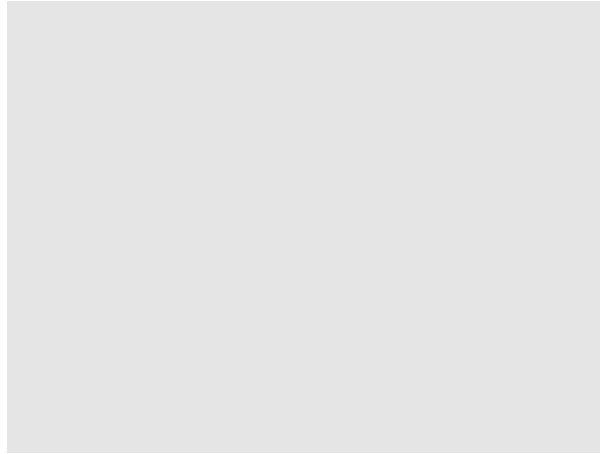
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WKU scientist honored by Chinese Geological Survey

By CAROLINE EGGERS ceggers@bgdailynews.com 3 hrs ago



Chris Groves

Submitted

While strikingly similar to Kentucky underground, southern China's surface-level karst landscape contains unique features.

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While attending an international gathering of geologists in China three weeks ago, Chris Groves didn't know he would need a tie.

The Western Kentucky University distinguished professor of hydrogeology routinely travels to southern China to study karsts, examine water supplies and attend conferences, so he had no reason to suspect that his presence at the China-ASEAN International Forum on Innovation and Cooperation for Sustainable Development in Guilin would be any different.

However, to celebrate Groves' 25-year mission of scientific diplomacy, the China Geological Survey presented him with a medal.

"It was a total surprise," Groves said.

Since he was a boy, Groves has been studying caves. This led him to WKU, which expanded his knowledge to Mammoth Cave National Park and many miles beyond.

By the 1980s, cave exploration began to become popular in China. "It was fabulous, the things they were finding," Groves said. "I was dying to go there."

In 1994, a Chinese cave scientist came to study at WKU, so Groves and his wife hosted him. And the next year, Groves flew to China to study at the Institute of Karst Geology in Guilin.

Although distinctive landscapes carve through southern China, the underground world is fairly similar to Kentucky's underground, according to Groves. But the caves have larger, 300-foot caverns.

"I didn't have any intention of going back," Groves said about his first trip. "I was very grateful to have an opportunity to go there at all."

But he ended up connecting with the science community and agreed to some collaborative work. His wife traveled with him, and they later adopted two daughters from China.

"It ended up being a major part of my adult life," he said.

For more than two decades, Groves hopped on overnight flights to help develop water resources in low-income, rural regions where people were walking for water each day. He trained Chinese scientists how to safely enter caves and map underground water supplies, while setting up a lab for underground dye tracing and building the related academic infrastructure.



At WKU, Groves teaches geology and directs groundwater flow investigations at the Crawford Hydrology Lab.

Groves still flies to China at least once a year, but he tries to remain home with his children more often than during his younger days as a scientist.

This recent trip wasn't Groves' first time being honored with a foreign scientist award in China. In 2017, President Xi Jinping shook his hand after he was one of six scientists presented with China's International Science and Technology Cooperation Award.

Before he returned home, Groves traveled to Beijing and was honored during the “Reception for Foreign Experts Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China” at the Great Hall of the People in Tiananmen Square, where he “clanked glasses” with Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng.

But ultimately, the greatest honor of this international work was expanding his worldview – which is the same opportunity he hopes to pass on to his students.

“It’s a big world. As a scientist or scholar of any sort, having as many different experiences as you can is a good thing,” Groves said.

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